

SELLING YOUR CAR? IS IT A SCAM?

Many service members serving overseas do not bother with the hassle involved in shipping a vehicle. Instead, they will purchase a used car when they arrive in country and most often, sell the vehicle before they leave. One of the most common places to advertise the sale of that used vehicle is the Stars and Stripes newspaper.¹ Each day the Stars and Stripes has hundreds of used vehicles for sale and most, if not all service members are aware of this. What they might not know is that con-artists also are aware of this fact.

Recently in the military community, several people selling their vehicle have been contacted by would-be buyers. These would-be buyers are often nothing more than con-artists preying on the service members. Here's how the scam works. After placing your ad in the Stars and Stripes, you are contacted via email by a "potential buyer." This scammer offers to buy your car and is even willing to send you more money than you are asking for. How lucky could one get, right? Wrong. Your luck may have just run out.

The buyer offers more money to cover the cost of shipping the vehicle to Western Europe or in some cases Africa. Remember your cousin, King Muntu who died and left you 25 million dollars? Remember how that money was yours as long as you provided a third party your banking information? Now you can see where this is going.

Assume you were asking \$5,000 for your vehicle. The con-artist sends you a check for \$8,000. The extra \$3,000 he wants you to wire to the account of the shipping company who will pick up the vehicle. In many cases, your bank will make the money available to you before the check can be verified as valid. Then you wire the \$3,000 to the "shipping company" and the scam is complete. You are now out your \$3,000 with little recourse.

Scams such as these can be prevented in a variety of ways. In law school, I was taught a system called the "smell test." The "smell test" requires you to review the facts and if something smells "fishy" then do not do it. In this case, why doesn't the buyer pay the shipper directly? Why would he want to pay \$3,000 to ship a vehicle that was not worth much more? The answers to these questions are fishy and certainly do not pass the smell test. Also, ask around. People are your best resources. See if anyone else has encountered your current situation and if so, how did they handle it? Finally, contact the Stuttgart Law Center at DSN: 421-4152 or CIV: 0711-729-4152 to make an appointment with a legal assistance attorney. After all, an ounce of prevention in the legal world can save you headaches and often thousands of dollars down the road.

¹ Stars and Stripes newspaper is just utilized as an example in this article. Nothing within this article shall be construed to imply any liability on Stars and Stripes newspaper or any other newspaper or media device that allows advertising space for used and or new cars.